

The NICHD Connection

September 2019

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Thoughts of a Postbac: Great Expectations

By Carissa Stover

It was a brisk January morning in Maryland. I was making my way towards Building 6, full of nervous energy and my head swarming with thoughts. I was so excited to be at the National Institutes of Health—the epitome of biomedical scientific research. I had made it. I expected to do great scientific research. I expected to gain invaluable skills and knowledge for my career. I expected that by the time I left the NIH I would feel confident in my skills as a scientist and ready to take on graduate study. Suffice it to say, I had high expectations.

What I didn't expect

were some of the struggles I experienced.

I struggled navigating full-time research and learning how to effectively communicate my thoughts and ideas with my Principal Investigator (PI). I struggled with imposter syndrome. I struggled learning that a postbac can be more stressful than undergraduate studies. I now realize that most of this was placed upon myself. I wanted to succeed—to be accepted into a good graduate school and to prosper in science. I learned that to struggle *is* to achieve.

What I didn't expect was to not only gain a greater understanding of myself as a scientist, but to gain valuable knowledge and skills outside the laboratory. During my postbac, I completed a year and seven months of research at the NIH.

Thoughts of a



Postbac



Postbac Poster Day 2019. Left to right: Dina O'Connell, Rima Sakhawala, and Carissa Stover. Photograph courtesy of Carissa Stover.

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Letter from the Editor

Don't be afraid to fail. That's my advice to our incoming postbacs—and really all people in general. Through failure, we gain insight, resilience, and experience. It's ok to tackle a daunting task. To attempt something you've never tried before. Don't assume the best or worst outcomes. Just do it.

For our postbac-themed issue this month, our award-winning NICHD postdocs have offered a few pieces of advice too. Check it out on [page 5](#). But first for our [front-page feature](#), former postbac Carissa Stover shares the valuable lessons she learned through her time at the NICHD. Her sentiments are a wonderful gift to pass on to our incoming postbac trainees.

Let's not forget about everyone else, as we have a lot of excellent research and career development opportunities coming up for all trainee levels. Dr. Suna Gulay updates us on the NIH Fellows Committee activities in her "[Rep Report](#)" and we welcome several [new clinical and postbaccalaureate NICHD fellows](#) as well. Pull out those calendars, because we have quite a few [September announcements](#) and [events](#). See you there!

Your Editor in Chief,
Shana R. Spindler, PhD

Questions, comments, ideas? Please contact our editor at shana.spindler@nih.gov.

Thoughts of a Postbac: Great Expectations

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I worked on three projects, during which I conducted experiments that honed the skills I need for my career. I analyzed and presented data, and I learned how to talk and write about science. I attended seminars, meetings, and workshops. I presented at Postbac Poster Day and the NICHD Fellows Retreat. I volunteered in the NICHD Office of Education for three weeks. I learned to push my boundaries.

What I didn't expect was the support I received outside of the lab. During my postbac, I came to realize that I needed to learn to ask for help. I grew up as the oldest sibling and one of the oldest cousins in a large family, and I was used to being completely independent. It was during a resilience workshop that I realized it was important to seek guidance and a support system, and that you don't have to be in the depths of despair to need it. The Office of Intramural Training and Education (OITE) and the NICHD Office of Education offered guidance and support when I needed it—and sometimes when I didn't know I needed it. The people in these offices helped me navigate my time at NIH and gain the most I could from my experience. I learned how to respond to struggle and stress with resilience, with my project and within myself.

What I didn't expect was the community I built with my peers. I became close to some of my fellow postbacs. We talked about science and went to workshops and seminars together. We shared our ups and downs. We took time to make sure we enjoyed ourselves outside of the lab by eating lunch in the sunshine and going to postbac events. Having peers to connect with and share the postbac experience with was fun and incredibly valuable. They are the only other people that know the experience you're going through. I learned the value of community.

My postbac met my expectations. I grew as a scientist, gaining valuable skills and knowledge for my career. I am attending George Washington University starting in the fall.

My postbac also exceeded expectations. I learned about myself and grew as a person. If I were able to give myself advice at the beginning of my postbac, I would tell myself to embrace my expectations but also look beyond them. I would tell myself that an experience at the NIH is what you make it: take advantage of your time here, seek opportunities and make your own, and remember to have fun.

My expectations and my actual experience were not the same—and I wouldn't change that.

Congratulations to the 2020 NICHD FARE Recipients

Congratulations to all fellows who received the annual Fellows Award for Research Excellence (FARE) for the 2020 competition. FARE is an NIH-wide competition that recognizes the important research of intramural fellows. We extend sincere congratulations to our 24 winners for their success and the honor they bring to the intramural programs of our institute. This year, NICHD had an excellent success rate with the highest number of applicants after NCI and NIAID. Also, a special thanks to everyone for sharing their research with the intramural community—90 NICHD fellows submitted an abstract!

The FARE award ceremony will take place on **Wednesday, September 11, 4 – 6 p.m. in Building 10, South Lobby**, during the annual [NIH Research Festival](#). To learn more about FARE, please visit <https://www.training.nih.gov/felcom/fare>.

Below is the list of NICHD award recipients and their mentors, **followed by advice for new trainees from some of our award-winning fellows**, in honor of this month's postbac-themed issue.

THE 2020 FARE RECIPIENTS AND THEIR MENTORS

Joshua Pemberton (Balla)*	Saroj Regmi (Dasso)*
Abhilash Puthuvelvippel Appu (Mukherjee)	Gali Ram Guterman (Marini)
Dvir Gur (Bonifacino)	Feng Li (Levin)
Lucia Bettedi (Lilly)	Suman Ghosal (Pacak)
Carlos Guardia (Bonifacino)	Nicole Ellis (Machner)
Gergo Gulyas (Balla)	Stephanie Lehman (Machner)
Morie Ishida (Bonifacino)	Mona Orr (Storz)*
Ellen Francis (Zhang)	Arya Vindu (Dever)
Tamal Sadhukhan (Mukherjee)	Saumitra Choudhury (Serpe)
Yuki Shibata (Shi)	Raffaella De Pace (Bonifacino)*
Marina Venero Galanternik (Weinstein)	Ming-an Sun (Macfarlan)*
Nicholas Ashton (Woodgate)	
Sonia Robinson (Yeung)	

(*Previous winners)

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Congratulations to the 2020 NICHD FARE Recipients

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ADVICE TO POSTBACS FROM NICHD POSTDOCS

"Never stop questioning. Ask questions about everything, don't be shy! You will be surrounded by a lot of smart people all the time, so do not miss the opportunity to learn something new every day." —*Charly Guardia*

"Science is exciting and fun, but at the same time it is demanding and requires a lot of sacrifice and resilience. One should choose a research field that one is really excited about and aim to excel in it. Put your best foot forward, be patient and everything else will follow." —*Sam Choudhury*

"If possible, work on projects that you are passionate about; remember that there is always an opportunity to learn in challenging situations; keep the big picture in mind; and, in everything you do, be diligent and careful—double or even triple check things before hitting that submit button." —*Sonia Robinson*

"Reading literature is just as important as spending your time at the bench. It's really common for rookies in science to think *why do I need to do this, what's the meaning of this project?* Your supervisors and postdoc mentors may give you the answers, but searching for papers related to your work will give you some new insight and understanding about the significance of projects." —*Feng Li*

"There is nothing that is not worth trying. If you never try, you will never know." —*Nicole Ellis*

Meet Our New Fellows

We are happy to welcome new fellows to the NICHD family. If you arrived recently to the NICHD and would like us to introduce you in our quarterly ["Meet Our New Fellows" column](#), please contact our editor, Dr. Shana Spindler, at shana.spindler@nih.gov.



MORTEDA ALAAMIRI

Postbac Fellow

Hometown: Dearborn, Michigan

Undergraduate institution: University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

NICHD Mentor: Dr. Keiko Ozato

Area of research: I am interested in neuro-inflammatory diseases, especially autoimmune diseases like Multiple Sclerosis. I focus on studying microglia, transcription factors, and their activities using genome-wide RNA-seq, ChIP-seq, and imaging techniques. I am new to the area and have been spending my time exploring. I typically enjoy time with friends, cooking, and watching sports. I look forward to meeting everybody.



MOHAMMAD AL-JUNDI

Clinical Fellow

Hometown: Amman, Jordan

MD institution: Jordan University of Science and Technology

Residency: Medstar Washington Hospital Center in Washington, DC

NICHD Mentor: Dr. Fady Hannah-Shmouni

Area of research: During residency, I worked with Dr. Kenneth Burman on radioiodine treatment of metastatic thyroid cancer.

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Meet Our New Fellows

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RASHA HAYKAL

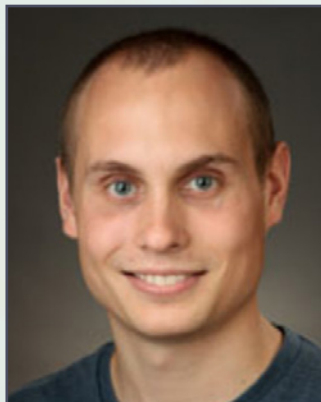
Clinical Fellow

Hometown: Tartus, Syria

MD institution: Damascus University
Faculty of Medicine

NICHD mentor: Dr. Fady Hannah-Shmouni

Area of research: I study metabolic changes and insulin resistance.



JOSEPH KRZESKI

Postbac Fellow

Hometown: Cincinnati, Ohio

Undergraduate institution: Xavier University

NICHD mentor: Dr. Dax Hoffman

Area of research: I study hippocampal development in relation to the voltage-gated potassium channel, Kv4.2, using a mouse model.

The Rep Report

By Suna Gulay, PhD

As the current NICHD Basic Sciences Institutes and Centers (IC) Representative, I represent NICHD postdoctoral fellows at the Fellows Committee (FelCom) meeting every month and share the latest news with you here. Do you have a concern or question that you want brought up at the next meeting? Contact me at suna.gulay@nih.gov!



It is the beginning of another term for many FelCom subcommittees with plenty of opportunities to volunteer, network, and gain transferable skills! Check out [this website](#) to get more information on what these different subcommittees do and how you can get involved.

FAES insurance open enrollment is here! Daily orientations will be hosted beginning September 9 through September 20 from 3 p.m. to 4 p.m. in the FAES conference room (1N241A, Building 10). Please attend one of these sessions to learn about any upcoming changes in the plan design.

The NIH Research Festival will take place on September 11 in Building 10. Highlights include exciting PI talks and a three-minute “data blitz” by FARE award winners. More information can be found [here](#).

Postdoc Appreciation Week is September 16-20. OITE and FelCom are planning various activities for the week, including an ice cream social! You may find a complete list of activities under the [OITE Upcoming Events page](#).

To receive the monthly minutes of FelCom meetings, subscribe to the [FELLOW-L listserv](#)! To learn more about how FelCom is helping the NIH postdoctoral community, join a meeting! We meet every first Thursday of the month at 4 p.m. in Building 1, Wilson Hall. The next meeting will take place on October 3, 2019, with a WebEx option available.



INTERESTED IN GRANT
WRITING OPPORTUNITIES?
Please contact Dr. Erin Walsh
(erin.walsh@nih.gov) in the
NICHD Office of Education.

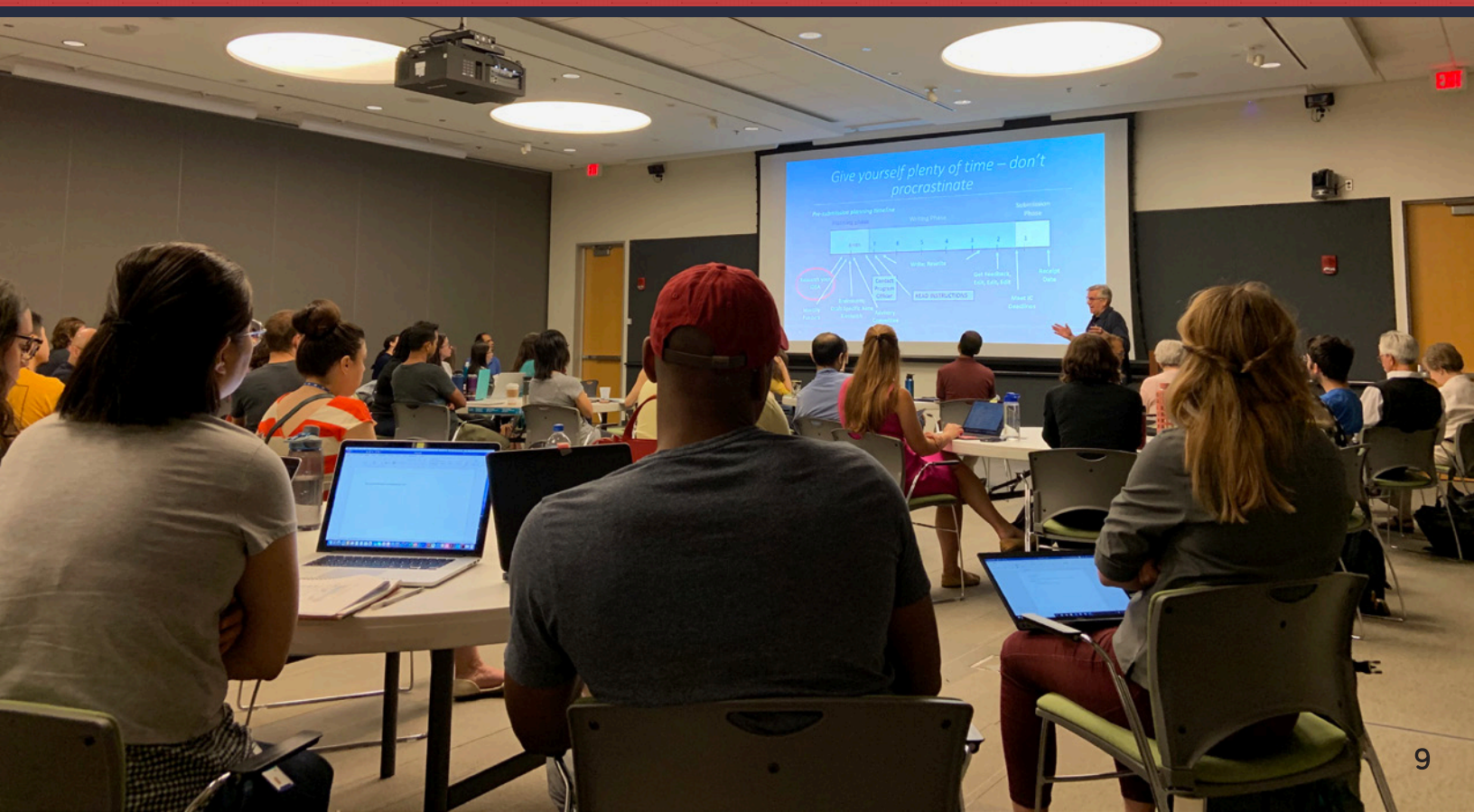


Life Outside Lab

Annual Grant Writing Workshop

MONDAY, AUGUST 12, 2019

PHOTOS BY FORMER POSTBAC CARISSA STOVER



Upcoming NIH-Wide Office of Intramural Training and Education (OITE) Events

For more information and registration, please visit [Upcoming OITE Events](#).

Academic Job Search: Applying (September 4)

PhDs in the Real World (September 4)

OITE Orientation for New NIH Postbacs: Getting What You Came For (September 5)

OITE Orientation for Graduate Students and Postdoctoral Fellows (September 10)

Workplace Dynamics I/II: Self-Awareness, the Key to Professional Success (September 10)

Scientists Teaching Science Two-Hour Workshop (September 12)

Assertiveness for Scientists: How to Ask for What You Need in the Lab and in Life (September 17)

FelCom Event: Scientific Support Jobs in Academia and/or Industry (September 17)

Ethics in Research Training for Postdocs (September 23)

Becoming a Resilient Scientist (September 26)

Scientists Teaching Science Online Nine-Week Pedagogy Course (starts September 30)

September Announcements

DUE THIS MONTH: INTRAMURAL RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP (IRF)

Funding opportunity for all NICHD postdoctoral and clinical fellows

In 2017, DIR launched the **Intramural Research Fellowship (IRF)**, a competitive research funding opportunity for NICHD postdoctoral, visiting, and clinical fellows. Its main objective is to promote grant writing among our intramural trainees, while enhancing awareness of the various components of an NIH grant application.

The IRF submission deadline is Monday, September 9, 2019.

For more information on the IRF, please visit [NICHD Intramural Research Fellowship](#).

NICHD SCIENTISTS UPDATE THE PUBLIC ONLINE

On August 15, 2019, scientists from the NICHD Division of Intramural Population Health Research, the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, and the University of California, Los Angeles, hosted a Reddit AMA (Ask Me Anything) as part of Reddit's AskScience AMA Series. During the event, members of the general public asked questions about environmental effects on health, health science career opportunities, and interesting directions for research. Check it out here: https://www.reddit.com/r/askscience/comments/cqoak5/askscience_ama_series_we_are_drs_brandy_beverly.

If you are interested in NICHD's social media activities, please visit <https://www.nichd.nih.gov/newsroom/digital-media/socialmedia>.



September Events

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 12 – 1 PM

NICHD Postbac Orientation Session & Pizza Lunch

Building 31, Room 2A48

Read more about Summer Poster Day at https://www.training.nih.gov/summer_poster_day.

Our institute has approximately 75 postbacs conducting both clinical and basic science research. We would like to bring our postbacs together to meet each other and discuss volunteer and training opportunities on campus. Learn about:

- » ICU simulator rounds
- » The annual postbac course
- » Genetics clinic shadowing
- » Children's Inn volunteer opportunities
- » And more!

The NICHD Office of Education aims to enrich fellows' NIH experience with career development, outreach, and social activities. If you would like to attend this informational event, please contact Dr. Erin Walsh at erin.walsh@nih.gov.

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, ALL DAY

NIH Research Festival 2019

Building 10

This annual event brings together researchers from across all NIH institutes for a multi-day opportunity to share research findings and form new collaborations. The general schedule of events and plenary session topics are available at <https://researchfestival.nih.gov/2019>.

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September Events

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MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 8:30 AM – 5 PM

NICHD DIR & DIPHR Scientific Retreat

Masur Auditorium and FAES Terrace

Please mark your calendars for the NICHD DIR & DIPHR Scientific Retreat. We strongly encourage all intramural researchers—PIs and lab members—to attend as we celebrate our achievements and spark new collaborations. Apart from an exciting line-up of talks, every lab will have the chance to present at least one poster.

Plus, the NICHD Office of Education will present this year's Mentor of the Year Award Winners!

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 19, 1 – 2:30 PM

Webinar for all NICHD Fellows: “Developing Your LinkedIn Profile”

In this webinar, Industry Careers Consultant Lauren Celano of [Propel Careers](#) provides guidance for how to build and develop a professional online brand on LinkedIn. The seminar will dive deep into the functionality of LinkedIn and will demonstrate how to customize a profile tailored to your career interests. Propel will cover how to develop/tailor sections including your summary as well as the experience and education sections. Examples will be shown for different types of roles, research and non-research, to indicate how details differ depending upon your career interest(s). Lauren will discuss how to use LinkedIn for networking, informational interviewing, and job searching, and will discuss how organizations utilize these tools to identify talent for open positions. Lastly, this webinar will cover how to use the job preference features on LinkedIn to let internal and external recruiters know what you are looking for. This webinar will be available to all NICHD fellows via WebEx. Please email Dr. Erin Walsh (erin.walsh@nih.gov) to register.

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September Events

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THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, 5:30 – 7:30 PM

Fellows Social Networking Event

Rock Bottom, a local restaurant in Bethesda

This is a great opportunity for the NICHD fellows' community to socialize and network with each other (*with good food!*) in an enjoyable environment. All current trainees within the institute are welcome.

Please send Dr. Erin Walsh (erin.walsh@nih.gov) a quick note if you plan to attend this event.